1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-S (1907-1908) 1911
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342 (figure 2) and the Bendiyagalge caves (figure 1) show. In the former the shelter was constituted by the weathering back for about five feet of a horizontal stratum softer than the rest of the rock mass. The shelter thus formed was about five feet high at its front and three feet at its back, and from personal experience we can testify that it afforded comparatively good shelter from the wet. This can hardly have been the case with such caves as Bendiyagalge which appear to have been formed by the weathering of a stratum with a dip of about 45 degrees, or by the oblique tilting and subsequent weathering of a rock mass such as appears to have formed Uhapitagalge (Plate XVII, figure 2). Indeed we were told that such shelters as Punchiammagalge and Bendiyagalge sometimes became uncomfortably wet. Plate XVII, figure 1, is a view taken to show as much as possible of the rock mass in which the Bendiyagalge shelters are formed, and this figure and that of Uhapitagalge when examined in connection with the plan of Bendiyagalge will give a good idea of the possibilities of a Vedda rock-shelter as a home. As will be seen from Plate XVIII, figures 1 and 2 of Pihilegodagalge (Sitala Wanniya), no care is taken to keep the cave clean. At Bendiyagalge we noticed an unpleasant odour about the cave due to the lack of sanitary precautions taken by the members of the comparatively large community then living in these caves. Plate XIX, figure 1, shows the general appearance of these caves including the steps (Plate IX) hewn in the rock between the lower and upper caves and the worked edge of the upper cave forming a drip-ledge. Plate XIX, figure 2, is an early morning scene in the cave, and was taken soon after its occupants had awakened.

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The love of the wilder Veddas for their rock-shelters, as well as their disregard for climatic conditions, is well illustrated by a remark made by Handuna the oldest and most influential man among the Sitala Wanniya Veddas, "It is pleasant for us to feel the rain beating on our shoulders, and good to go out and dig yams and come home wet and see the fire burning in the cave and sit round it."

152 Such a remark is in itself evidence of a cheerful disposition, and before going any further we must describe the Vedda

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911 ·
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temperament. Travellers have called the Vedda morose, and stated that he never laughs; this belief has doubtless been strengthened by the disagreeable behaviour of the "show" Veddas (see p. 50), yet Veddas have told us how they throw leaves in the air and laugh and dance for joy. Nevill was certainly right when he said, "They are a merry people, delighting in riddles, songs and jests. Mr Hartshorn observed some Vaeddas who never laughed in his presence. They must have been either terrified, or sulky and offended, for those I have seen, of all clans, laugh often and merrily, a habit very strongly contrasted with that of the Sinhalese, who scarcely ever go beyond a smile. They burst into a verse of song, now and again, apparently from sheer exuberance of spirits, and any ludicrous incident amuses them[1]."

At Bendiyagalge we were particularly well situated to observe their behaviour, our camp being out of sight of the Vedda cave but within 200 yards of it, here we could listen to their unrestrained chatter and laughter which was especially noticeable at sunset. It is true that their faces express no emotion of pleasure or gratitude when they are given exactly what they expect. Thus, white cloth, which the men like to wear, is well known to them, they buy it themselves from the Moormen pedlars, it is the usual present for a European to make to Veddas, and they receive it with perfectly stolid faces, and are hence dubbed sullen. We had an excellent example of this at Henebedda when we gave a piece of white cloth to Poromala the senior of the group, whom we knew well and who had frequently smiled and laughed in our presence. When, however, a sharp pruning knife was given him his face beamed like a schoolboy's, he ran his thumb along the blade and tried its edge on pieces of grass. Things new to them which we showed

[1] *Taprobanian*, Vol. I, 1886, p. 192. Veddas often dance for a few moments when pleased, thus a Henebedda Vedda on being given a piece of sacking to cover himself with after complaining of cold, immediately held it over his head, bowed his body forward and went through a few dance steps, singing the while. On another occasion this man and three companions (all young men) began to dance spontaneously. This was about 9 p.m. one night in the courtyard of the Ambilinne Rest House, where they had visited us, their sense of well-being in this case may have been stimulated by a liberal feed of curry and rice which had been given them, but we do not think they danced in payment for this.

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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Things new to them which we showed.

152 522 them often provoked peals of laughter; to see the eldest and most venerable man solemnly have his thumb nail pressed by a brass machine (algometer) was particularly amusing to the rest of the community, one man actually rolling on the ground with laughter. The old man took it all in excellent part and smiled indulgently. Doubtless Veddas vary much in character, but all except the "show" Veddas are genial and courteous, and have always been rightly considered truthful. At Sitala 153 Wanniya Handuna was the most intelligent man, keenly in- 554 terested in all the new things we showed him; he obviously 156 ruled the community by force of character, coupled with the fact that he was a shaman. Nila, however, was also a shaman, but he was obviously not so strong a man as Handuna, to whose opinion he deferred, and naturally took second place. Vela, half-brother of Handuna, was extremely shy but by no means stupid, he generally tried to get out of doing things, professing inability, but when urged by Handuna did everything as well as the other men. Kaira, *basna* (son-in-law) to Handuna, was intelligent and talkative and inclined to be boastful. Pema, *basna* to Nila, did not speak much, chiefly we thought because he was a young man and had not much to tell, for although he did not chatter like Kaira he smiled and did not hang his head when addressed, as Vela did.

342 592 621 423 Whether staying in a "private" or "communal" cave the family life continues in much the same manner. If in a communal cave, each family keeps strictly within its own limits, the women may always be seen at exactly the same spot, and when the men come in they sit or lie beside their wives, keeping to that part of the cave floor that belongs to them as carefully as though there was a partition dividing it from that of their neighbours. Figure 2 is a plan of Pihilegodagalge showing the actual division of floor space. Food is frequently 621 cooked by one woman and shared by all the members of 422 the community, in fact, although it might be cooked separately, it did not seem that any food was private property. One other fact was very noticeable in communal caves, namely, that men never kept their bows and arrows in their own division, but always put them all together in a particular

3:Naish G-5 (1925) 1930 AX5 Vedda AX5

of an exhortation to the villagers not to be afraid, as no harm would come to them. It need hardly be said that such a prophecy was extremely *à propos* from my point of view. I began to think that perhaps the Chief Headman was right and the time spent upon the ceremony was not wholly wasted.

The two principal dancers at length finished their dance and returned to their station near the shrine; and in their place ten or a dozen people, with a very old man as *choregos*, danced a similar dance, threading their way among the ranks of the people in single file. From time to time they would suddenly break off their dance, and rushing back tumultuously to the open space about the "maypole" would beat upon the pole with the bunches of leaves which each of them held in either hand, crying "*Wach! wach! wach!*" The Chief Headman, himself a Hindu, gave me the following interesting interpretation of the symbolism of this dance:—"The pole represents Brahma, the Source of Life, and the dancers wandering about among the people represent human life, at the end of which the soul returns to its Creator for a while with glad cries."

Later this dance was again danced by the same persons, led by the two red-jacketed principal dancers. Then the announcement was made that the goddess was coming from the river, and the two principal dancers began a very solemn, ecstatic dance under a canopy. As they danced the excitement grew tenser and tenser and their motions became more and more convulsive. They were firmly held by those near them,—a precaution necessary, the Chief Headman assured me, to prevent them from running amok among the spectators,—and seemed to struggle to shake off the restraint thus put upon them. Gradually, however, their efforts slackened, and they finally sank unconscious upon the ground.[9]

them on pp. 335-9, and that the "principal dancers" mentioned were not coast Veddas, but were brought in from outside. The point is one of some interest; but as, unfortunately, I did not go into it at the time, I do not feel at all certain about it.

[9] The Seligmanns say on p. 134 of *The Veddas*, "Most sincere practitioners whom we interrogated in different localities agreed that . . . they never entirely lost consciousness." After the dance here described the

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

familiarity savouring even of impudence and disrespect. But that is because they know no better. I have had a Vedda address me as "*tho*," a word now used only towards a very inferior person. A Vedda once took my gun and cartridge-bag to shoot us something for dinner. He returned empty-handed and disgruntled. I inquired what ailed him.

"What sort of cartridges are these?" he said, throwing down the bag contemptuously. "You fire at a wanderoo, and he sits and grins at you. You fire again, and he grins the more. You want six or seven big shot for animals, not *kurrukkan* grains."

I asked him how he knew the size of the shot in my cartridges. He answered that he had looked inside. It was not until the next day that I realised the thoroughness of his investigation. Every single cartridge in the bag, some fifty or more, had its wad at a rakish tilt! When I upbraided him for the liberty, he disarmed my wrath by laughing uproariously.

On one occasion we had pitched our tent under a big tree which caught fire through the carelessness of our cook who had pursued his occupation by its foot. As I lay in bed ignorant of a blazing branch overhead, I was warned repeatedly by the carriers of the danger of my position; but to these anxieties my tiredness made me deaf. "After to-night," said a Vedda, "no devil will be able to return to Colombo!" The words were electrical in effect—and in good time too, for the branch fell just as the tent was dismantled.

The quaintness of the Vedda language is always a delight. Not knowing the art of dissembling, they say just what they think. They are capable of exquisite and spontaneous similes and metaphors. Vulgarity is natural to them, and their talk is interlarded with phrases that would make a navvy blush.

I have said that a Vedda laughed uproariously. Now, it has been stated repeatedly, by persons professing to know all about Veddas, that these people are incapable of laughter. The statements have even gone to grotesque lengths as the sub-joined extract testifies.* When a

*THEY NEVER LAUGH

MOST SOLEMN TRIBES IN THE WORLD.

Laughter, and the faculty of being merry and bright, are gifts of the gods to a world in which there is not too much sunshine at any time.

But this gift, according to the scientists who know all about these subjects, has been denied to the Veddas, the aboriginal inhabitants of Ceylon. It is the only people in the world who never laugh, and in consequence they are thin and flabby folk, and a fat man among the Veddas would be an extraordinary sight for sad eyes. A traveller who has studied the early races in Ceylon gives some interesting particulars about this curious tribe.

For nearly 2000 years, according to the best chronicles, these people, now almost extinct, have preserved the same characteristics, and no one, so far as history reveals, has ever seen a smile on the face of one of them or heard a laugh while in their section of Ceylon.

Why these people do not smile is a mystery. They alone of all the people on the earth know nothing of the sensation of laughter.

A scientist, who recently journeyed to Ceylon for the purpose of investigating this question, persuaded some of them to permit him to tickle them in the ribs and in the middle of their feet with straws, and never caught even the flicker of a smile on their faces, nor did he ever succeed in making one of them squirm and laugh aloud during the operation.

(*Continued on next page*)

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

181 sophisticated Vedda knows what is expected of him he will act up to
152 the expectation right enough. Personally I have never yet met a Vedda who could not laugh. The truth is that the Vedda will laugh with the best of us when there is occasion; but he is a stranger to the conventional, hypocritical smile of civilisation, meant only to please and so uncertain an index of the heart. The Vedda's face, like a child's, is a mirror to his mind.

His natural expression is one of apathy and moroseness. Schooled to hardship and privation, he is neither greatly distraught by sorrow nor transported by joy He expresses his emotions with more moderation than we; he is the greater fatalist; and accepts with stoic equanimity the hard conditions of his life which have wrought into his expression a dour indifference, a decorous gravity.

There is something naturally fierce in his nature; and it does not do to anger him. The tradition is undoubtedly true that the Veddas, at one time, carried in their betel bags fragments of human liver which they chewed when roused, to give fire to their frenzy. And this is probably the origin of the Sinhalese threat, "I'll eat your liver!" There is a spot in the Eastern Province which commemorates to this
[173] day an early incident of colonisation: A Vedda had once way-laid and killed a European soldier, and going up to him could hear the ticking of his watch; examining this he said, "His life is still here," and dashed it to pieces on a rock.

When a Vedda returns from an expedition no one must speak to him until he has rested and it has pleased him to talk first. One who had accompanied us once on a hunt nearly killed a Sinhalese boy who innocently asked him what he had brought, the moment he arrived. Most sportsmen, Vedda or not, are impatient of cross-examination when fatigued—especially if unsuccessful.

771 The Veddas have no conception of a supreme being; nor have they any myth or theory bearing on cosmogony. The panorama of the heavens is beyond their questioning; but its supremacy is instinctively
195 avowed: "*Mā Suriya Deyyo*" (by the Sun God) is an oath by which the Vedda vouches his good faith.

776 Like animals, concerned only with their immediate needs, they take the world very much as they find it. But if the aloof heavens leave their imaginations untouched, not so their immediate environment. Here exist real powers more within the pale of their comprehension, influencing every act of their lives, overshadowing their credulous minds, and affording at least some data on which to found a faith. Is it surprising then that they people Nature with sentient beings, unseen, but very evident by their acts. And what spirits more comprehensible to the primitive mind, more inspiratory of faith and fear, than those of one's

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Another strange thing about the Veddas, and one which may possibly be connected with their lack of humour, is the fact that every one of them is a George Washington, unable to tell a lie or to conceive of anyone else telling a lie.

They cannot even believe that any one would take the property of anyone else, and association with civilisation has failed to convince them that it is possible.

With all this—or, rather without all this—the Veddas are a peaceable, gentle, quiet people. They take wives without any marriage ceremony, and are faithful and constant to them, supporting them to death.

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222 And as he works he sings the cutter's song* and many a vulgar song besides. For this is the epic event of the Vedda's life, and never is he so happy as when engaged in the perilous work. Wild is the jungle night and the rocks around re-echo to his song.

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The honey-gatherer at work

When the "devil's mouth" is full, he releases it from the ladder and shouts "*adapo*" (lift) to those above; they pull on the attached rope. With a series of short jerks, the cutter climbing and helping from below, the honey is lifted. As each pull brings the vessel to the level of the cutter's head he calls out "*ho-ho*," and the hauling is stopped; then, climbing a rung or two he gives a helping hand and cries "*adapo*" again. And so, with "*adapo..... ho-ho*" following each other in quick succession, the precious freight is safely hauled over the edge of the cliff. It may be that the cutter has to descend to his work again. With the last load he climbs over the top, a figure to behold—sweating, exhausted, honey-bedaubed, bereft of all the stamina that has sustained him so long. He throws himself down. Nor have all his arts availed him against the bees, for he is covered with stings. Solicitously his wife and a friend or two group round him, and with pitying words pick off the stings. But, impatient of this, he besmears himself with sand that the ants may not worry him, and is soon asleep.

Such is the story behind the potful of *bambara* honey the Vedda offers for a trifle of grain or a fragment of cloth.

Borri, borri, borri, borri,
Borri, borri, borri, borri.
Ama, ama,
Aramaya, aramaya, aramaya, aramaya,
Tholung badonage adung padung kolkoi koyya
Ekale karale puleng ande kanthuleng
Gegung thegena yanna
Alutta Vannaiya!

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

interfusion of Vedda blood—the apathetic look, the scanty beard, were unmistakably there. The area we had to traverse was not extensive, hemmed in, as it was, by the Bibile-Maha Oya road on the one hand and Mahaweli on the other. It is five miles from Alutnuwara to Arawatta; six miles from that to the Ulhitiya Oya; thence seven to Beligalla which is within four to six miles of Bulugahadena and Dambana, the Vedda haunts of to-day. The going is through forest comparatively well peopled; and *chenas* are frequently met with; changing from year to year, these often absorb the path and obliterate it, causing deviations which lead astray even guides conversant with the country a few months previously.

We were nearing Bulugahadena when we met our first Vedda of these parts—a tall, picturesque fellow with ear-rings, shouldering his bow stave with a small gourdful of honey slung on its end. Unspoilt, reserved and natural, in contrast to his fellows whom we afterwards met, he was the finest Vedda we saw in Bintenne.

In an environment, not of virgin forest, but of derelict *chenas* we found the Veddas of Bulugahadena. They lived scattered about, a hut or two to each *chena*, and not in groups as one so often sees; the explanation we were given for this was not the obvious one that *chenas* were apparently easier of acquisition here than elsewhere, but that it served to keep the families apart and prevent social entanglements, Veddas being very jealous of their women.

There was no reserve about these people. As we approached each hut, the men, armed with axes, bows and arrows, came out and greeted us vociferously in the Vedda language; Sinhalese they affected not to know. Their women were mostly sullen and silent; but one at least gave us a better reception than her husband did. Here and there a sickly wretch craved for medicine.

Their huts, made of bark slats and wattle, were too well built for Vedda habitations; they had not that crudity and unkemptness so characteristic of the huts of the wilder Veddas, and most of them were finished off with a neat fence-work. There was no lack of *kurrukkan* and maize here; and on the whole they seemed a fairly prosperous and contented community.

The Veddas of Dambana, who lived four miles away, were much the same as those of Bulugahadena; and so were the others we met scattered about these jungles. One lot we found picturesquely grouped in a rock-shelter, reproducing to perfection the old cave life; but they were obviously there for our benefit!

Of these Veddas, considered as a whole, we may say that we had never before seen so many of them as on this short trip of barely a week. On previous journeys, after having traversed miles and miles of jungle, we had met only a Vedda here and a Vedda there, never more than a dozen in all, often but one or two. But in Bintenne we saw no less than about fifty good specimens. Though they were obviously sophisticated by their nearness to Badulla and the many occasions on which their representatives had been on show, Vedda blood is still strong in Bintenne. This is the place to come to if one wishes to pick up the few words that are left of the Vedda language, and the art of making bows and arrows; but apart from that, these people are too civilised to be interesting.

One episode we experienced here is worth recalling. Two Veddas, better disposed towards us than the rest, one with his lip all askew from